Introduction

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Despite the abandonment of the royal cemeteries at Meroe many aspects of Meroitic rituals and symbolism survived into the Early Makurian period. Grave goods and furnishings were an essential part of burial customs and religious traditions. Grave goods were provided for the deceased's last journey and for eternity. Jewellery, personal adornments, and other objects found with the deceased were a manifestation of social status during earthly life.

Burying the dead with grave goods was a deeply rooted custom among the ancient Nubian people, from as early as the Mesolithic through conversion to Christianity in the mid-6th century [see chronological table, Fig. 3 at the end of this volume] (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 80). In the Mesolithic period the deceased were given pottery and stone tools such as mace heads and adzes. In later periods, the A-Group and C-Group cultures reflected contacts with Egypt, and Nubian traditions became mixed with Egyptian influences. A large range of goods was deposited in graves, including jewellery, pottery, food and drink, and numerous Egyptian imports (Haynes 1992, 40; Welsby and Anderson 2004, 277). The tradition of burying the deceased on a bed appeared with the C-Group, and was continued into post-Meroitic times (Welsby and Anderson 2004, 227–228). In the Kerma period metal weapons, such as bronze daggers and knives, appeared for the first time in the grave goods repertoire. Under Egyptian domination local Nubian traditions appear to have given way for the most part to Egyptian traditions and influences, but with the end of Egyptian hegemony there was a revival of Nubian traditions in the Napatan period (Welsby and Anderson 2004, 279–281). However, Egyptian influence remained very strong during the New Kingdom occupation and the Napatan and Meroitic periods, and did not disappear in post-Meroitic and Early Makurian times.

The tumuli yielded a wealth of burial equipment made of various raw materials, in many instances sadly damaged by adverse environmental conditions and displaced by robber activity. These included personal adornments, weaponry, pottery, and other burial equipment such as weaponry or furnishings. The material needs of the deceased were satisfied with large numbers of utensils as well as food. Many objects were made of composite materials (e.g., metal and wood, or metal and bone); of these only the metal parts have been preserved in reasonable

condition, the state of the organic materials, such as wood and leather, being largely residual.

Jewellery mainly consisted of necklaces made of ostrich eggshells, red agate, pear-shaped white or black quartz beads, as well as round and tubular beads of green and blue faience. Bronze armlets, pendants, iron and bronze earrings, and bracelets were also found. Pottery, broadly presented in volume 11, was a significant component of the goods deposited in graves. Weapons constituted another significant category of grave goods, becoming an essential item in the Early Makurian period, unlike Late Meroitic times. Knives and barbless iron arrowheads were frequently deposited in graves (Mahmoud El-Tayeb 2012, 80–82). The post-Meroitic period witnessed the growing prominence of military materials, often included in burials, ironwork became much more plentiful, and crafts such as basketry also seem to have flourished (Edwards 2004, 207–208).

The third volume in the **Early Makuria Research Project. El-Zuma Cemetery** publication deals with the small finds excavated from the tombs in the El-Zuma tumuli field, both the graves and the tumulus superstructures and robber shafts. The material has been organized into three main categories: ornaments; weaponry and personal accessories; and burial equipment. In each section, chapters provide a presentation of the material, complete with discussion and catalogue. A group of unidentified metal items, stone, glass fragments, leather and organic materials are presented as miscellanea (Chapter 18).

The state of preservation of the metal objects and the analyses methodology are discussed in Chapter 19, along with a presentation of the results of specialist research on selected artefacts.